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Message Text

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R 201022Z JUL 78
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AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
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AMEMBASSY BONN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 PRAGUE 1911

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDING BONN AS ADDRESSEE)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PGOV, CZ
SUBJECT: CZECHOSLOVAKIA 1978: AUGUST APPROACHES

SUMMARY: WE REVIEW CURRENT CZECHOSLOVAK SITUATION AS 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF 1968 WP-5 INTERVENTION APPROACHES. WE CONCLUDE THAT, POLITICALLY, REGIME'S STABILITY WAS REINFORCED BY BREZHNEV VISIT BUT PERHAPS NOT TO POINT OF FULL SELF-CONFIDENCE IN FACING AUGUST; ECONOMICALLY, DOLDRUMS PERSIST; MILITARILY, MUTUAL EMBRACE WITH SOVIETS CONTINUES TO TIGHTEN. CONFIDENTIAL

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IN BILATERAL RELATIONS A FREEZE IS IN EFFECT ON MAJOR MATTERS, BUT ON LESSER BUSINESS REMAINS ABOUT AS USUAL. END SUMMARY.

1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW: YEARS ENDING IN "8" ARE ESPECIALLY SIGNIFICANT IN THE HISTORY OF INDEPENDENT CZECHOSLOVAKIA - 1918, 1938, 1948, 1968. REGIME'S BEST EFFORTS THIS YEAR HAVE FAILED TO DRAW PUBLIC ATTENTION

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TO 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF FEBRUARY 1948 COMMUNIST SEIZURE
OF POWER AND AWAY FROM 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF 1968 PRAGUE
SPRING AND CONSEQUENT SOVIET-LED INTERVENTION OF AUGUST
1968. PRAGUE SPRING CAUGHT IMAGINATION BOTH OF CZECHO-
SLOVAK PEOPLE AND OUTSIDE OBSERVERS AS IT ROUSED HOPE
THAT A WAY HAD BEEN FOUND FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS TO
FLOURISH IN A COUNTRY TIGHTLY LINKED TO THE USSR. APPROACH
OF 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF CRUSHING OF THAT HOPE HAS AROUSED
INTENSE INTEREST IN THE WEST AND RECIPROCAL CONCERN IN
THIS REGIME THAT WESTERN AGENCIES OR DOMESTIC DISSIDENTS
WILL USE IT TO DISTURB EXISTING TRANQUILITY. WE
THOUGHT IT USEFUL TO PREPARE A MID-1978 APPRECIATION OF
THE STATE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA JUST BEFORE THE ANNIVERSARY.

2. IN GENERAL, AVAILABLE EVIDENCE SUGGEST THAT ANNIVERSARY
WILL PASS WITH MEREST RIPPLE TO DISTURB PREVAILING POLITICAL
APATHY. WE CAN DETECT NO MOOD IN THE POPULATION TO DIVERT
ITS ATTENTION FROM PURSUIT OF CONSUMERISM AND SUMMER
HOLIDAYS TO CAUSE TROUBLE IN AUGUST. EVEN CHARTER 77
ACTIVISTS WERE HESITANT ABOUT ISSUING ANNIVERSARY DOCUMENT
AND WHAT THEY HAVE DECIDED TO ISSUE IS, IN CURRENT DRAFT,
HIGHLY LEGALISTIC AND HARDLY INFLAMMATORY. POSSIBILITY
OF SOME "WILD CARD" ENTERING THE GAME CANNOT, OF
COURSE, BE RULED OUT.

3. LEADERSHIP AND STABILITY: 1978 OPENED WITH
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PRESIDENT AND PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL HUSAK'S HEALTH
AND GRIP ON LEVERS OF POWER SOMEWHAT IN QUESTION; RUMORS
THAT HE MIGHT RELINQUISH PARTY LEADERSHIP WERE FREQUENT.
WITHIN A FEW MONTHS, HOWEVER, HUSAK HAD SHOWN THAT HE
REMAINED FIRMLY ON TOP, CERMONIALLY, BY THE HONORS
SHOWN HIM ON HIS 65TH BIRTHDAY AND 30TH ANNIVERSARY
FESTIVITIES, AND, PRACTICALLY, BY THE ELEVATION OF A
SECOND CLOSE ASSOCIATE WITHIN SIX MONTHS TO RANK OF PARTY
SECRETARY. ANY REMAINING DOUBT WERE ERASED BY THE MAY 30 -
JUNE 2 BREZHNEV VISIT, WHICH UNEQUIVOCALLY PLACED LEONID
ILICH'S PERSONAL STAMP OF APPROVAL ON HUSAK AND COURSE HE
HAS SET FOR CZECHOSLOVAKIA. SUCH REPUTED RIVALS OF HUSAK
AS ALOIS INDRA AND ANTONIN KAPEK WERE VIRTUALLY INVISIBLE
IN THE MEDIA DURING THE VISIT, AND ONLY VASIL BILAK -
WHOSE RUTHENIAN NATIONALITY MAKES HIM AN OUTSIDER IN
SUCCESSION RUNNING AND PERHAPS MORE AN ALLY OF CONVENIENCE
THAN RIVAL OF HUSAK - RECEIVED SOME SPECIAL RECOGNITION,
BUT MEASURABLY LESS THAN THAT ACCORDED HUSAK.

4. WITH ANY QUESTION ABOUT LEADERSHIP STABILITY THUS
RESOLVED, REGIME, NEVERTHELESS, DID NOT FEEL RELIEVED OF
CONCERN LEST AUGUST BRING IT PROBLEMS. IT IS FULLY AWARE

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THAT 30 YEARS OF COMMUNIST RULE HAS FAILED TO ERADICATE "BOURGEOIS" ELEMENTS FROM CZECHOSLOVAK CHARACTER AND THAT ITS FAITHFUL SUPPORTERS ARE GREATLY OUTNUMBERED BY POLITICALLY APATHETIC MASSES TEMPTED BY WESTERN LIVING STANDARDS. IT IS TROUBLED BY SMALL BUT VOCAL NUMBER OF DISSIDENTS OF VARIOUS IDEOLOGICAL HUES. IT CANNOT FEEL SURE THAT SOME JAN PALACH WILL NOT CHOOSE AUGUST TO COMMIT AN ACT THAT COULD SIEZE THE IMAGINATION OF THE MASSES AND APPEARS TO HAVE SOME WORRIES WHETHER IT CAN DEAL WITH SUCH A SITUATION WITHOUT BEING EMBARRASSED BEFORE WORLD OPINION OR INCURRING MOSCOW'S DISPLEASURE. STANDARD COMMUNIST PARANOIA MAKES REGIME CERTAIN WEST WILL USE ANNIVERSARY TO CREATE UNREST AND SIGNIFICANCE OF YEARS ENDING IN "8" ADDS ELEMENT OF
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AMEMBASSY BONN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 PRAGUE 1911

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDING BONN AS AN ADDRESSEE)

BEFORE BREZHNEV VISIT PROPAGANDA MEDIA WERE CARRYING STATEMENTS ABOUT NECESSITY OF THE SOVIET INTERVENTION. THAT VISIT FIRMLY SET LINE THAT WP INTERVENTION HAD BEEN VITAL TO DEFEAT COUNTERREVOLUTION AND HAD COME JUST IN TIME; IT ALSO REMINDED THAT BREZHNEV DOCTRINE STILL EXISTS. SINCE THE VISIT, MEDIA HAVE CARRIED INCREASINGLY FREQUENT RECRIMINATIONS ABOUT "MISTAKES" MADE UNDER DUBCEK WHICH MADE "FRATERNAL ASSISTANCE" NECESSARY. IN ADDITION TOO PROPAGANDE, REGIME IS TAKING OTHER STEPS TO ENSURE QUIET IN AUGUST. CERTAIN DISSIDENTS HAVE BEEN ADVISED THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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PERIOD AROUND AUGUST 21 WOULD BE PLEASANT TIME TO BE IN THEIR COUNTRY HOUSES. THOSE WHO STAY IN PRAGUE CAN EXPECT TO BE DETAINED FOR POLICE "IN-VESTIGATION". WESTERN JOURNALISTS ARE UNLIKELY TO RECEIVE VISAS FOR MID-AUGUST VISITS. WE EXPECT POLICE WILL CLOSELY CONTROL AREAS IN PRAGUE WITH 1968 SIGNIFICANCE TO PREVENT EFFECTIVE DEMONSTRATIONS. LITTLE ROOM FOR PUBLIC PROTEST WILL BE LEFT EXCEPT FOR THE UNPREDICTABLE SUCH AS WESTERN TOURISTS OR A JAN PALACH.

6. ECONOMY: THE PROBLEMS BESETTING THE ECONOMY - STAGNATION, INEFFICIENT MANPOWER, INFLEXIBILITY, DE-CREASING INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS, ETC. --SHOW NO SIGNS OF CHANGE. AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM TO IMPROVE QUALITY AND PRODUCTIVITY SPONSORED BY FINANCE MINISTER LER IS ONLY STARTING, WITH NO RESULTS LIKELY TO BE VISIBLE FOR SOME MONTHS. NO EASY SOLUTION IS AVAILABLE TO GROWING ENERGY SHORTAGE; COMPLETION OF ADRIA PIPELINE WILL IMPROVE ACCESS TO FUEL SUPPLIES; BUT WILL NOT SOLVE HARD CURRENCY PAYMENT PROBLEM. GOC WOOING OF OPEN MEMBERS HAS SO FAR HAD LIMITED SUCCESS IN OBTAINING ADDITIONAL OIL, --FROM IRAN AND, ACCORDING TO ONE SOURCE, IRAQ -- BUT NOT AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE GAINING ANY PRICE CONCESSIONS.

7. IN ADDITION TO PREVAILING MACROECONOMIC PROBLEMS, CZECHOSLOVAKIA CONTINUES TO SHARE DIFFICULTIES ITS CEMA COMRADES FACE IN SATISFYING DEMAND FOR FOOD AND QUALITY CONSUMER GOODS. BASIC PROBLEM APPEARS TO BE AS MUCH INEFFICIENT DISTRIBUTION AS ACTUAL SHORTAGES, BUT CONSUMERS COMPLAIN OF DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING

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VARIOUS TYPES OF MEAT AND VEGETABLES AND, IN WINTER,
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FUEL. URBAN CONSUMERS HAVE BENEFITTED THIS YEAR FROM IMPORTANT HOLIDAYS AND STATE VISITS, WHICH, UNDER PREVAILING DOCTRINE, CALL FOR STORES TO BE WELL STOCKED WITH GOODS OTHERWISE IN SHORT SUPPLY. IN BETWEEN FESTIVITIES, HOWEVER, TIMES HAVE OCCASIONALLY BEEN RELATIVELY LEAN. WE SUSPECT MID-AUGUST WILL BE AN ESPECIALLY GOOD PERIOD FOR CONSUMERS.

8. REGIME CONTINUES TO BE RELUCTANT TO TAMPER WITH CONSUMER PRICES AND HEAVILY SUBSIDIZES BASIC FOODSTUFFS: RUMORS FREQUENTLY CROP UP OF RISE IN GASOLENE AND SOME OTHER PRICES, BUT SO FAR HAVE PROVED FALSE.

9. EXTERNAL: CZECHOSLOVAKIA CONTINUES TO PURSUE ACTIVIST, "NUMBERS GAME" DIPLOMACY IN PURSUIT OF INTERNATIONAL RESPECTIBILITY, CHALKING UP NUMEROUS VIP VISITS AND AGREEMENT SIGNINGS. THIRD WORLD REMAINS IMPORTANT TARGET IN INTEREST OF SERVING AS SOVIET SURROGATE, AS WELL AS SELLING INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS NOT MARKETABLE ELSEWHERE, BUT EUROPE IS NOT NEGLECTED. RELATIONS WITH AUSTRIA ARE SHOWING REAL AND STEADY PROGRESS; MIXED COMMISSIONS ARE WORKING WELL AND PRESIDENT KIRSCHLAGER WILL VISIT CZECHOSLOVAKIA THIS FALL. HUSAK'S APRIL VISIT TO THE FRG CAUSED ONLY A BRIEF LULL IN PROPAGANDA ATTACKS BUT FRG DIPLOMATS HERE CLAIM RELATIONS WITH MFA OFFICIALS ARE BETTER THAN BEFORE. A MOVE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN PETERED OUT. RELATIONS WITH REST OF WESTERN EUROPE TEND TO BE AT ARM'S LENGTH, DUE BOTH TO CURRENT HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION AND LASTING MEMORIES OF 1968, ALTHOUGH GOC MADE MODEST EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH GREECE, SPAIN AND PORTUGAL.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 PRAGUE 1911

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDING BONN AS ADDRESSEE)

10. REGIME REMAINS DEVOTED TO PROJECTING IMAGE OF BEING USSR'S MOST DEVOTED ALLY BOTH BILATERALLY AND IN CEMA AND WP. ON SURFACE AT LEAST CZECHOSLOVAKIA APPEARS MOST EAGER PROPONENT OF GREATER CEMA INTEGRATION. MILITARILY, CZECHOSLOVAKIA APPEARS TO HAVE MOSCOW'S CONFIDENCE AS A CAPABLE ALLY, WITH ITS ARMED FORCES INTERACTING CLOSELY WITH SOVIET FORCES IN FREQUENT JOINT EXERCISES. HIGHLY VISIBLE MARK OF SOVIET SATISFACTION WITH CZECHOSLOVAK MILITARY WAS CHOICE OF CSSR AIR FORCE OFFICER AS FIRST NON-SOVIET COSMONAUT. LESS VISIBLE BUT MORE TANGIBLE CONFIDENTIAL

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ARE STEADY DELIVERIES OF LATE MODEL SOVIET EQUIPMENT TO CZECHOSLOVAK UNITS.

11. BILATERAL RELATIONS: ON MAJOR ISSUES BILATERAL RELATIONS ARE AT A STANDSTILL. DEPARTMENT HAS DIRECTED THAT THERE BE NO MOVEMENT ON THE LONG-STALLED EXCHANGES AGREEMENT UNTIL THIS FALL AT THE EARLIEST, AND GOC HAS BEGUN TO HINT AT FREEZE ON ALL CULTURAL ACTIVITY UNTIL AGREEMENT IS SIGNED. CLAIMS/GOLD REMAINS IN APPROXIMATELY THE SAME STATUS IT HAS BEEN IN SINCE 1974 AND CONTINUES TO PREVENT ANY REAL IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS. ANTI-US PROPAGANDA HAS GROWN MORE VIRULENT IN RESPONSE TO THE CHILL IN US-SOVIET RELATIONS; IT RECENTLY REACHED LEVEL OF PERSONAL ATTACK ON PRESIDENT CARTER AND ESPECIALLY DR. BREZINSKI THAT WE FELT REQUIRED

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US TO PROTEST ORALLY TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. CZECHOS-
LOVAKS HAVE THROWN OUT SOME HINTS THEY ARE QUESTIONING
VALUE OF JOINT ECONOMIC COUNCIL AND SPECIFICALLY USEFULL-
NESS OF ANNUAL MEETINGS; THEY MAY WELL RAISE IN SEPTEMBER
THE IDEA OF REDUCING SIZE OF GROUP AND LEVEL OF PARTICI-
PATION FOR FUTURE MEETINGS. ON POSITIVE SIDE, GOC WAS
FULLY COOPERATIVE IN ARANGING CODEL MCGOVERN VISIT.

12. ON RELATIVELY MINOR ISSUES WE CAN STILL MAKE SOME
PROGRESS. TECHNICAL SALES SEMINARS ORGANIZED BY THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE HAVE BEEN WELL RECEIVED AND
ATTENDED, ALTHOUGH ATTENDANCE A THE LAST ONE, HELD IN
JUNE, APPEARED TO SUFFER FROM THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE.
NEVERTHELESS, US PAVILION AT INCHEBA TRADE FAIR IN LATE
JUNE EXPERIENCED NO PROBLEMS, BEING VISITED BY, AMONG
OTHER SENIOR OFFICIALS, PARTY PRESIDIUM MEMBERS COLOTKA

AND LENART; OTHER SLOVAK DIGNITARIES INDICATED THAT THEY
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WOULD WELCOME MORE U.S. TRADE PROMOTION IN THEIR
REPUBLIC. PROBLEMS HAVE ARISEN IN OUR CIVIL AIR
RELATIONS, BUT THIS IS AN AREA WHICH BOTH THE FOREIGN
MINISTRY AND MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION MAY WISH TO
KEEP FROM FALLING VICTIM TO DETERIORATING RELATIONS
FOR REASONS BOTH OF PRESTIGE AND HARD CURRENCY
EARNINGS.

13. IN CONSULAR AND HUMANITARIAN MATTERS REGULATION
58 HAS PROVEN VERY HELPFUL IN REGULARIZING STATUS OF
"ILLEGAL EMIGRANTS" AND PERMITTING FAMILY VISITIATION.
IT HAS BEEN ADMINISTERED RELATIVELY FLEXIBLY, BUT THERE
HAVE BEEN SOME RECENT INDICATIONS OF BUREAUCRATIC
STIFFENING. THE RATE OF RESOLUTION OF DIVIDED FAMILIES
CASES DECREASED IN THE FIRST HALF OF 78, BUT WE BELIEVE
THIS REFLECTS THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE FEW REMAINING
CASES AS WELL AS A POST-BELGRADE REDUCTION IN THE
GOC'S EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH THIS PROBLEM.

14. WE HAVE SO FAR FAILED TO REVNXD ANY LASTUUG INCREASE
IN LEVEL OF HARASSMENT OF EMBASSY PERSONNEL OR AMERICAN
TOURISTS IN RESPONSE TO CURRENT STATE OF RELATIONS OR
US-SOVIET CHILL, ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF
INCIDENTS IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS WE HAVE CALLED TO MFA
ATTENTION. JOURNALISTS CONTINUE TO FACE FAMILIAR PROBLEMS
IN COVERING CZECHOSLOVAKIA.

15. OUTLOOK: WE SEE NO REASON TO EXPECT ANY GREAT
CHANGE IN CZECHOSLOVAK DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN POLICY OR
IN BILATERAL RELATIONS DURING THE REST OF THIS YEAR.

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ON ITS SIDE, THE CZECHOSLOVAK REGIME HAS NEITHER ROOM
NOR APPARENT DESIRE TO MOVE OUT OF ESTABLISHED PATTERNS.
ON OUR SIDE, AS THIS EMBASSY HAS SAID SO MANY TIMES
BEFORE, WE CAN NEVER EXPECT STARTLING IMPROVEMENTS IN
RELATIONS WITH CZECHOSLOVAKIA, AND CANNOT EXPECT EVEN
SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS UNTIL CLAIMS/GOLD IS SETTLED.
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NEXT YEAR MAY SEE AGREEMENT, BUT MUCH WILL DEPEND ON
HOW AUGUST PASSES AND ON THE CLIMATE OF US-SOVIET
RELATIONS AS THE YEAR BEGINS.
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